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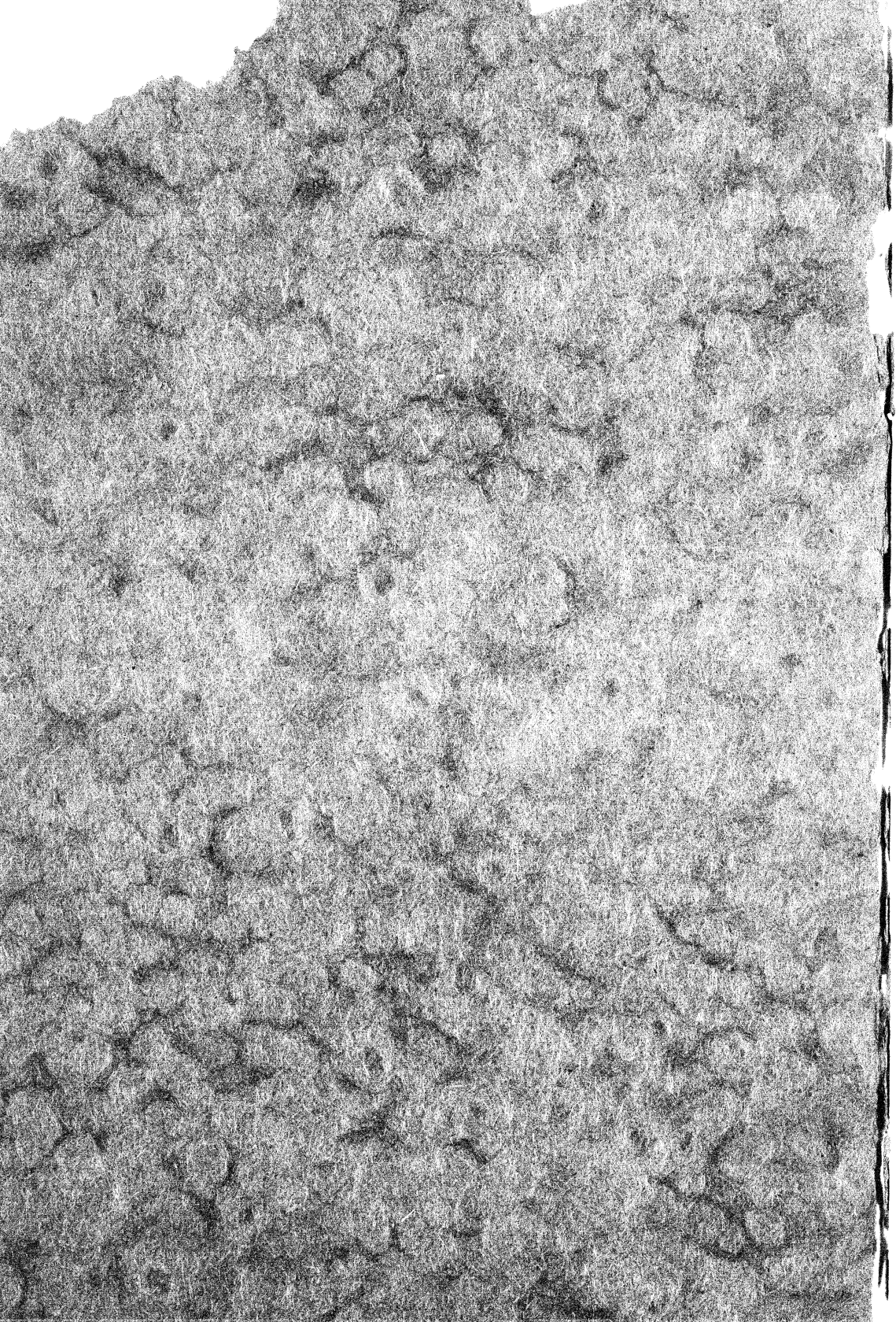
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# THE PROBLEM OF TEACHING ENGLISH TO THE PEOPLE OF PORTO RICO

BY JOSÉ PADÍN, A. M.  
GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT



SAN JUAN, P. R.:  
BUREAU OF SUPPLIES, PRINTING, AND TRANSPORTATION  
1916



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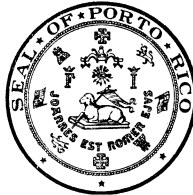
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## PREFACE

The matter of teaching modern languages has undergone considerable reform during the past fifteen years both in the United States and Europe. At times modern-language teachers have thought that the task of teaching a foreign language to a number of high-school or university students is a discouraging one. The matter of attempting to teach a new language to all of the pupils of a given country presents difficulties far more serious, especially when nearly all of the teachers who attempt this task do not speak this language as their native tongue. Such has been the case with the introduction of English into the public schools of Porto Rico.

The so-called language question has been subject to considerable discussions in recent years. Reforms and radical changes have been proposed in the usual way that arguments for reforms in educational matters have been advanced heretofore. Eagerness to apply remedies has preceded the sensible course of investigating causes; whereas the proper course would be, first, the investigation of causes; second, an intelligent propaganda for reform based upon the facts learned as a result of the investigation, and third, the application of adequate remedies.

The study of the teaching of English by Mr. Padín presented in this bulletin is perhaps the first effort at scientific investigation of professional educational problems under the American administration in Porto Rico. The revelations disclosed in this study may be unwelcome, but, nevertheless, they are forceful, eloquent and convincing. The Department of Education considers this study of sufficient importance to have it printed in the form of a bulletin for general distribution to all teachers of Porto Rico and other persons interested in our educational problems.

My earnest hope is that all teachers in the service will read this bulletin carefully and intelligently with a view to improving instruction in the schools and lending their own best efforts to bring about greater efficiency in the teaching of English.

PAUL G. MILLER,  
*Commissioner of Education.*



## **THE PROBLEM OF TEACHING ENGLISH TO THE PEOPLE OF PORTO RICO**

During the current year (1915-16) Dr. Paul G. Miller, Commissioner of Education for Porto Rico, has been conducting a series of educational tests in the elementary graded schools for the purpose of ascertaining the efficiency of the school system. This bulletin is based on a study of papers written by eighth-grade pupils in answer to a reasoning test given to this grade. The test aimed to determine the ability of the grade to reason in practical situations. It was given in English to some 43 eighth-grade groups representing the entire graded system. Due to the fact that both English and Spanish are used in the elementary graded system as media of instruction and that the relative amount of time which should be devoted to each language is a much disputed question, it was deemed advisable to examine the papers written by the eighth-grade pupils to find out the quality of English which they have acquired after eight years of training under the teaching plan now in force and to try to discover whether the results of this teaching, as revealed in the papers, justify a readjustment of the present bilingual plan of instruction. The data contained in the papers examined are specially valuable because the pupils now enrolled in the eighth grade have received practically their entire school education under the bilingual plan of instruction in force. These pupils represent the finished product of the bilingual scheme of instruction. The quality of English which they can write may be taken as typical of the best that can be acquired under the plan in use.

The data presented in this bulletin and the conclusions reached were drawn from 25 of the 43 sets of answers written by the pupils. These 25 sets were so selected that they represent fairly the best, the medium and the poorest local school systems. They represent eighth grades from large, middle and small towns and villages, as well as coast and mountain districts. In going over these papers, the following excerpts were made:

(a) Whole answers, representing the best types of connected English written by the pupils;

(b) Whole answers, representing the worst types of connected English;



(c) The most common mistakes in construction and idiomatic usage. From a mass of these, a large number which did not appear frequently enough to constitute common mistakes, were rejected.

In the following pages the excerpts are given together with the questions used in the reasoning test. Each question contains a statement. The pupils were required to say whether the statement was true or not and to give reason.

A.—BEST TYPES OF CONNECTED ENGLISH.

*First Question*—San Juan is the largest city in Porto Rico because it is the capital.

(1) "It is true that San Juan is the largest city of Porto Rico, but not because it is the capital, but because it has more people than any other in Porto Rico, and because has much more high buildings more plazas, more schools, and the largest Post Office, and larger in size than any other in Porto Rico."

(2) "San Juan is not the largest city in Porto Rico because it is the capital, because the capital of a country may be also the smallest city."

*Second Question*—During vacation we have a good time but we do not learn anything.

(1) "It is true with some people, but not with others. Some children do nothing but play and have good times, without noticing that they were wasting their time but there are others, that have good times and try to learn something at the same time."

(2) "During vacation we have a good time, but we also learn. For example, if we are in the country, we learn about birds and animals. If we are in a town we learn something about its customs if it is strange to us, and if it is familiar we learn more about every-day life."

*Third Question*—Children go to school in order to become teachers, doctors, lawyers and merchants, and so they will not have to work.

(1) "Children go to school to learn different things which they may need in the future so as to be able to keep a position by working, if a person is a doctor and he does not work he cant be able to live unless he begs."

(2) "No matter if we are teachers, doctors, lawyers or merchants, we must work in regard to our occupation, for if one wants to lead a honorable but happy life, he or she must work because no lazy creature is happy."

*Fourth Question*—Porto Rico is an agricultural country because most of the people live in the country.

(1) "Porto Rico is an agricultural country because the soil is very fertile and the people like to work, not because all the people live in the country."



(2) "Porto Rico is an agricultural country not because all people live in the country but because it has a fertile soil and abundant water."

*Fifth Question*—A man earns \$1,200 per year; he spends \$940, therefore, he can put \$230 into the bank.

No selections were made from the answers written to this question.

*Sixth Question*—If I were rich I should be happy, because then I could buy everything I wanted.

(1) "After being rich and buying everything wanted, in the course of some years money is gone and we become poor again."

(2) "That statement about happiness and richness is not true. Money does not make anybody happy, for it can not give intelligence, knowledge nor any virtue."

*Seventh Question*—All the lawyers I know are good men; all the soldiers I know are bad men. Therefore, lawyers are better men than soldiers.

(1) "If all the lawyers *you know* are good men, and all the soldiers *you know* are bad men, therefore the lawyers *you know* are better than the soldiers *you know*."

(2) "You dont know all the lawyers there are neither all the soldiers there are, so you are not right in your decision."

*Eighth Question*—To possess liberty means that we can do as we please.

(1) "If we possess liberty we must obey our laws and not do as we please."

(2) "To possess liberty means that we can do anything that is right but not anything wrong because then we abuse of liberty."

*Ninth Question*—If all the money in the world should disappear, people would not be able to buy or sell anything.

(1) "It is not true that if all the money in the world should disappear we would not be able to buy or sell anything, because other objects then could serve as money. Ex: the American Indians used tobacco as money."

(2) "If all the money in the world should disappear the people could trade something with another thing and we could life very well without money."

*Tenth Question*—Mr. X is a very good man because he is very popular; Mr. Y is a bad man because the newspapers say many bad things about him.

(1) "Half of what the newspapers say are lies, therefore, we must not judge anybody for his popularity. Also everybody good or bad has enemies while they have also friends."

(2) "I do not think that being popular is a very good reason for Mr. X to be a good man because being popular he can do wrong things. I do not think that Mr. Y is a bad man because the newspapers say bad things about him. Sometimes the political parties have to do with the newspapers."

These samples of connected English represent the very best that the eighth-grade pupils can write. These excerpts were taken from

the best three sets of papers and from the best individual papers among them. Roughly speaking, the pupils from whose papers these selections were made represent less than 1 per cent of the total enrollment in the eighth grade.

B.—WORST TYPES OF CONNECTED ENGLISH.

*First Question*—\* \* \*

(1) "San Juan is not the largest city because the capital had nothing to see with the largest"

(2) "There are many reasons about San Juan. It is very progress than the others city"

*Second Question*—\* \* \*

(1) "It is not true. The ones during vacation that not learn is because he doesnt want."

(2) "It is not true, becaused the vacation not give to us good times. An also the vacation has any relation with our good time"

*Third Question*—\* \* \*

(1) "Yes children go to school to learn and to become teachers, doctor, lawyer and merchants and they have to work because knowing all that they did not work is the same as knowing nothing."

(2) "It is true that children go to school to became a good man and to became so that can hold a good occupation. but it is not true that they had not to work because does not work, they can not earned money to live."

*Fourth Question*—\* \* \*

(1) "Yes, Porto Rico is an agricultural country, but now the vegetation is to small all the men did not want to work because the prise of the journalist (laborer) is to cheaper and we say that Porto Rico would not became an agriculture country because there are some others country that he make more the articles cheaper than this and make Porto Rico to Fair." (*Who can understand this?*)

*Fifth Question*—No selections were made from the answers written.

*Sixth Question*—\* \* \*

(1) "No if you were rich you should not be happy because you can buy everything you wanted because the money should be spend all then what are you going to buy."

(2) "It is not true because the people that were rich has money to lived as they want but as they think very much in how they spend the money and how to work more to become more rich it was not happy."

(3) "No. Because the money if you take out and do not get in became a time when you found that no more money you have. Then you have to work but work that you cannot For that reason is that any one who is reach they have to work in order that the money never finished."

(4) "If we are rich we should happy because with money we do shall we want and have not to work and visited the countries that we want"

(5) "The six question is true, because if we were rich, we had many money, and we can buy everything we wanted with our money"

*Seventh Question*—\* \* \*

(1) "No. Both are equal. If lawyers help us to any cause hapened soldiers help us in any cause also. So remember what Mr. Lincoln say in their speech at Gettysburg, he said: "all mens are created equally.""

(2) "The lawyers are not good men than soldiers, because the lawyers they almost made law to gain in the court.

And soldier go to defend there country with there blood, those are good mens."

*Eighth Question*—\* \* \*

(1) "Not, because we have some limits, that is we have laws to be respect and we should not broke the laws, to possess liberty is to be free and to be a progress nation like Switzerland and not like Haiti that the people do not know how to use their livity."

(2) "This question is not true because if wee have the privilege to be liberty we should be moderate and to possess liberty means that if a man thinks that he is honest and a good man he will not do was he please on account that he has liberty"

(3) "Not, to possess liberty did not means that we can do ail as we please because we can has liberty and made what our families said."

*Ninth Question*—\* \* \*

(1) "It is not true. Because those who had no money they could changes anything for food for the time that more money is make."

(2) "No because in olden time exchanges was used and we can use it also."

(3) "If all the money disappear the buy or sell will not finish because we can exchange our goods."

(4) "If all the money in the world disappear people then dedicated to work in the grown by fishing, etc. and so on they can buy thing by changing one with anothers."

*Tenth Question*—\* \* \*

(1) "The good of a man does not depend for their proffertion."

(2) "No, Mr. Y is not a bat man. Why because the newspaper resist all what the people write in it."

The above excerpts were taken from practically every one of the 25 sets of answers examined and from a large number of individual papers. This type of English is what more than 50 per cent of the pupils enrolled in the eighth grade write ordinarily. It is safe to state that 80 per cent of all the pupils enrolled in this grade do not write English much better than the children from whose papers these selections were taken.

## C.—THE MOST COMMON MISTAKES.

The most common mistakes found in the 25 sets of papers have been classified under nine heads, as follows:

1. *Misuse of nouns and adjectives.*—The frequent occurrence of such errors as these: “we can be liberty”, “a nation is progress”, etc., shows a lack of sureness on the part of the pupils in the use of the most elementary parts of speech. The most common mistakes of this type, however, are to be found in the misuse of such words as: *some, any, anything, something, much, many, few, little*, etc. Between these words and their Spanish equivalents there are certain differences in usage which account for the mistakes made by the pupils.

2. *Irregular plurals.*—We begin to teach these in the third grade. The irregular inflection in number of certain nouns is a characteristic feature of English treated in all our textbooks. Yet, the papers examined show that the eighth-grade pupils have not mastered such common forms as *men* and *children*. The words *mens* and *childrens* appear in the papers with astonishing regularity.

3. *Division of words into syllables.*—This is one of the features of written English which give the most trouble to our pupils. We begin to teach it in the fourth grade and take it up off and on in the other grades. It would be unfair to expect that our pupils should divide syllables with the same facility which American children generally exhibit. However, it is not too much to ask that our eighth-grade pupils know with certainty that whole syllables are not divided. Mistakes such as these: *who-le, becau-le, beca-use, go-ods, ma-de, beco-me*, etc., show ignorance of the most elementary rule.

4. *Inflection of the adjective in number.*—The papers are plagued with such errors as the following: “important things”, “others things”, “goods lands”, “news plans”, “richs”—meaning rich people or the rich—, “ours homes”, “somes books”, etc. This error is derived from Spanish.

5. *Comparison of adjectives.*—The following samples, selected at random, show a disheartening lack of acquaintance with this important feature of English speech: “the soldiers are as better as the lawyers”, “more rich”, “the most large”, “more deeper”, “more larger”, “there are other cities nearly the same largest as San Juan”, “the soldiers are equal than the lawyers”, “the more largest”, “other cities that are largest than San Juan”, “the lawyers are not good men than soldiers”, “there are anothers cities largest than it without being the capitals”, “as largest as”, “San Juan has not the greater

population", "more big", etc. It is impossible to conceive a greater variety of inflected forms for the English adjective.

6. *Use of pronouns.*—We begin to teach pronouns in the first grade. Eighth-grade pupils who are expected to analyze compound-complex sentences and to recognize and use correctly restrictive relative clauses and modal auxiliaries should know the personal pronouns. The following errors need no comment: "She (San Juan) can be the capital", "the ones during vacation that do not learn is because he doesnt want", "soldiers have his breakfast"—*his* referring to soldiers—, "if I pass my vacation in the country we can learn", "the newspapers can say anything he wants"—*he* referring to newspapers—, "people can have lands which produce him"—*him* referring to people—"the soldiers are fighting for his country", "they have to work for his family", "All body have a person that rules upon him", "they had to work to maintain himself", etc. The following passage is remarkable:

"I think that if your were rich we should be happy because a person that have money they can do everything they wanted and because he can spent all the money they have and nobody can said nothing."

7. *Use of the auxiliary verbal forms "do," "does," "did."*—The usage of these three forms is another idiomatic feature of English. The following errors show that the eighth-grade pupils have not mastered them: "if they does not work", "does not means", "he do not put", "by dont learning anything", "to possess liberty do not mean", "do not means", "dont means", "we do will not become", "did not means", "we does not", "did not saved me", "you do not could buy", "does not made", "that does not belonged to me", "does not finished", etc.

8. *Use of the verb.*—The verb is the very heart of any language. A foreign language is not mastered until the learner can use its principal verb forms freely and accurately. English verb forms are comparatively simple. The following excerpts show how deficient our eighth-grade pupils are in this essential: "he would spends", "to made", "he can left some money to be spend", "we must said", "those who becomes rich lives in good conditions", "a teacher, a doctor, a lawyer and a merchant has to work", "to has money", "the persons that are richs can made what they pleases", "he can bought", "will engaged in agriculture", "can has", "will helped", "newspapers can tells", "to remained", "by been rich we could", "we can saw", "he can lost", "he can remains", "we can did things", etc.

The errors found in the idiomatic usage of such verbs as *to be*, *to do*, *to make*, etc., are too numerous to mention.

9. *Tense sequence*.—Pupils who can not use verb forms correctly will, in the nature of things, fail to follow the rules of tense sequence. Our eighth-grade pupils are no exception to this rule. The following excerpts illustrate the most common errors: “if it was not true we shall come to school”, “if I were rich I will be happy”, “if we didnt work it cant be”, “if I should be rich I’ll be glad”, “if I should be rich I am always thinking in the money”, etc.

Before analyzing the content and the method of the teaching plan which produces such results, let us examine the *why* and the *how* of the bilingual system of instruction used in the elementary graded schools.

Regarding the aim of the Department of Education in establishing a bilingual system of instruction, the Commissioner of Education makes the following statement on page 340 of his last report, under the head of The Language Question: “from the earliest days of the American occupation, the purpose of the Department of Education has been to establish and develop a bilingual system of education which would insure the conservation of Spanish and the acquisition of English.” And further on in the same paragraph, the Commissioner adds: “it may be safely said that the Department has not adhered to any other policy more firmly than it has to this—the conservation of Spanish and the acquisition of English, both to be mastered sufficiently for practical use.”

Although this language question has been discussed with considerable animosity, the wisdom of teaching English in the public schools has never been seriously challenged by the people of Porto Rico. They are as keenly alive to their linguistic opportunity as the school authorities have ever been. A great many people question the advisability of teaching subjects other than the English language *in English* and argue that this tends to retard the progress of the pupils and to destroy the purity of the Spanish language—the thin, entering wedge which must, eventually, destroy the mother-tongue of the people of Porto Rico and, with it, their individuality. Personally, the author believes that no matter what the ultimate status of Porto Rico may be (and he grants that the ultimate status of Porto Rico and its language question are intimately related), this island will remain an intellectual and spiritual as well as an economic dependency of the United States. Our youth will continue to go north for advanced academic and technical training. Our merchants and

professional men will keep in close touch with the North American development of business and science. The steamers that will continue to ply between our ports and the northern coasts will feed the current which has had already a tremendous influence on our life. There is no escape from this transforming influence. Our insular life is not self-sufficient. The stimulus and the inspiration for continuous growth must come from without. They will come from the United States. And because North American ideals are destined to exercise such a powerful influence on our life, it is desirable that we make the closest acquaintance with those ideals. The majority of the people of Porto Rico can not familiarize themselves with North American ideals at first hand, that is, by actually living in the United States; consequently, they must do so through the next best means: through the English language. A superficial knowledge of the English language is not enough. For cultural purposes in the ordinary sense, a reading knowledge of a language may be sufficient. To catch the spirit that animates the life of a people, to know and absorb their ideals, it is indispensable to master their language, to possess it wholly. Therefore, in attempting to give the children of Porto Rico as complete a mastery of the English language as it is feasible to give through the medium of a school education, the Department has acted with the fullest realization of the educational interests of the people.

Such being the aim, the question reduces itself to finding a teaching plan that will insure the conservation of Spanish, the acquisition of English and the mastery of both sufficiently well for practical use. So stated, the Department of Education holds that the problem is one of pedagogy rather than of local politics or international statesmanship. And the Department has attempted to find a solution by experiment. Whether the attitude assumed by the Department of Education toward this question is viewed from the standpoint of pedagogy or the broader one of statesmanship, it must be conceded that it is liberal, true to the democratic principles dear to free Americans. Germany pursued a more effective course, perhaps, in Alsace-Lorraine and Russia in Finland. In Alsace-Lorraine every French teacher ceased the day that Germany took over the sovereignty of this province. In Porto Rico out of the 2,467 teachers employed at present in the public schools, including high and continuation schools, 172 or less than 7 per cent are Americans. In 1900, the American teachers constituted 8 per cent of the teaching force; in 1910, 10 per cent. During the current year only 74 of the teachers of English employed to teach in the grades of the elementary system are of



American birth. These figures are eloquent testimonials of the benevolent policy pursued in Porto Rico. The United States has no interest in denationalizing Porto Rico, impassioned denunciation to the contrary notwithstanding, and, consequently, the more effective German or Russian method has never been considered a possibility. But the United States has the moral obligation of so directing the education of the people of Porto Rico that they will derive the greatest benefit from their connection with the Union. For mutual understanding and sympathy, it is necessary that the *few* (Porto Rico) learn the language of the *many* (the United States). Moreover, the Department of Education recognizes that, perhaps, a knowledge of Spanish and English are the two most valuable assets which the people of Porto Rico may secure to participate usefully and profitably in the widening sphere of Pan-American interchange. The Department is making an effort to organize a plan of instruction which will put the majority of the people of Porto Rico in possession of these two assets.

The first plan tried by the Department of Education to teach English was one by which this language was taught as a special subject by special teachers. These special teachers were Americans with no knowledge of Spanish or only a slight acquaintance with it. None was required. These teachers were expected to teach English according to the methods used in the States. The vernacular was not only deemed unnecessary, but is was strictly proscribed. The plan was tried for approximately ten years. It failed. Its failure has been thus acknowledged by the Department of Education:

"Gradually it became evident that the teaching of English as a special subject was not producing tangible results. To master a language for practical use the learner must receive constant ear and verbal drill. Our pupils were not getting enough practice because they used English in the English class only and Spanish in school during the rest of the day, as well as in the playground, the street and the home. They were not acquiring the habit of thinking in English. A language is not mastered until the learner is able to think spontaneously in terms of its vocabulary."

The firm conviction that the plan of teaching English as a special subject was not producing desirable results led the Department to conduct a series of experiments to determine whether any of the instruction offered in the elementary graded schools could be given in English by Porto Rican teachers. This seemed the proper procedure to give the pupils more practice in the use of English. Eventually, this plan would convert the American special teacher into a

regular grade teacher in charge of an upper grade where she could put a finishing touch on the English taught by the native teachers in the lower grades. The experiments were held in the San Juan, Ponce, Coamo and Arecibo districts during the year 1904-5. The development of secondary schools about this time forced the issue by showing the necessity of giving the pupils in the graded schools a more thorough preparation in English than was then the case. These secondary schools had to be organized on an English basis for reasons so obvious as to need no discussion. Suffice it to say that the lack of adequate textbooks printed in Spanish, together with the lack of personnel and the popular demand that high-school graduates be given a preparation in English that would enable them to continue their studies in American institutions without loss of time, settled the question of the medium of instruction in the high schools without further consideration. The solution given to the question in the high schools conditioned largely the solution to be given to it in the elementary graded schools; otherwise, the lack of articulation in such an essential as the vehicle of instruction would have seriously interfered with the work of the high schools.

The experiments seemed to demonstrate the possibility of using English as the medium of instruction in the elementary grades of the urban system. Gradually, the change was made from Spanish as the sole medium of instruction in the grades to a bilingual plan in which each language is taught as such and also as a vehicle of instruction for other subjects. Further experimentation showed the possibility of beginning both languages in the first grade as well as the advisability of teaching Nature Study, fourth-grade geography and fifth-grade hygiene in the Spanish language. And, thus, step by step, testing and rejecting or accepting, the Department has developed the present bilingual scheme of graded instruction in which the relative amount of time devoted to each language is as follows:

Grade	English	Spanish	Either	Total
	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
1-2.....	37.5	28.1	34.4	100
3.....	43.1	30.8	26.1	100
4.....	36.95	36.95	26.1	100
5.....	49.2	26.1	24.7	100
6.....	53.8	18.5	27.7	100
7.....	55.4	18.5	26.1	100
8.....	55.4	18.5	26.1	100
Average.....	47.34	25.35	27.31	100

Now, is this bilingual plan effective? Does it satisfy the demands of the language policy, that is, does it insure the conservation of Spanish, the acquisition of English and the mastery of both? Are the pupils who finish in the elementary graded schools well prepared in English, in the use of English, to take up advanced work in English in the secondary schools and progress normally? Inasmuch as the data examined in this bulletin deal exclusively with the results of English instruction, no definite answer can be given for Spanish. This part of the problem will be the subject of another study. As for English, we are constrained to confess that while it is true that our eighth-grade pupils are able to understand simple oral and written English, there is overwhelming evidence to show that they are totally deficient in English composition; that they do not have a grasp on the structure of the language; that they are singularly weak in the fundamental characteristics of English speech, and that, in general, their knowledge of English or, rather, their lack of knowledge, is an altogether inadequate return for the amount of time and effort devoted to the acquisition of this language.

What is the trouble? Is this the result of poor teaching? Unquestionably, poor teachers and poor teaching are largely responsible for these results. The English that the Porto Rican child learns before he reaches the seventh or eighth grade is taught entirely by native teachers. Many of these teachers speak the language fluently and correctly; some have remarkable teaching ability. Such teachers generally succeed. But it must be confessed that the majority of the Porto Rican teachers do not possess a sufficient command of English to teach this language successfully under the conditions which obtain in our school system. It is common observation that a large number of our English graded teachers not only fail to improve the stock of English with which they begin teaching but they actually go back. They lose fluency and spontaneity of expression. Some—altogether too many of them—are unable to hold an ordinary conversation dealing with facts outside of the verbal range of their particular grade. This loss has been more in evidence since the Porto Rican teachers were exempted from the annual examinations in English. And it will continue to be evident as long as the authorization to teach in English is granted from period to period irrespective of the effort made by the teacher to keep up his English and to show a reasonable degree of improvement. On the other hand, the average American grade teacher, because of her lack of knowledge of Spanish and her unfamiliarity with adequate methods of teaching English to

Spanish-speaking children, fails to realize the difficulties which the Porto Rican child has to overcome to master English and she does not emphasize the weak points. However it may be, poor teachers and poor teaching alone will not account for the poor results obtained in English.

Is the bilingual scheme of grade instruction fundamentally wrong? The temptation to answer this question in the affirmative is strong. And, yet, bilingual instruction is a common practice in countries which have a dual language. Such is the case in the province of Quebec where both English and French are used extensively as media of instruction in the public schools. The same is true of the Transvaal. There, the first lessons are given to the child in his native tongue; then English is gradually introduced and proficiency in it is a necessary condition for promotion. In the Orange Free State, the children are taught through the medium of English and Taal (the mother-tongue) after the fourth grade. In none of these countries does the duality of the medium of instruction produce the loss of the mother tongue, the imperfect acquisition of the foreign language or a material decrease in the efficiency of the children so trained. On the contrary, the mastery of both languages is secured and, with it, valuable assets for greater usefulness. Moreover, in Catalonia and Galicia, where the Catalanian and Galician dialects are the languages of the home, Castilian is taught exclusively in the public schools. In other words, the children are taught wholly through a medium totally foreign to them. At home they think and express thought in one language; at school, in another. In spite of this, we find *Catalanes* and *Gallegos* in the very forefront of every intellectual or industrial movement of Spain. The extreme duality between the language of the home and the language of the school does not appear to be fatal to the training of these peoples.

But before we reach a conclusion in this matter, it is indispensable to determine whether the *method* and the *content* of the plan of English instruction used to further the bilingual scheme are the best that could be devised to achieve the desired end. We suspect that the trouble lies herein: that the *method* and *content* of our plan of English instruction are fundamentally wrong.

We do not begin well. Take the ——— series of readers, for instance. The series is backed by solid and brilliant theory of reading. In the States, under the immediate direction of the authors, the method has achieved a tremendous success, according to report. With us, with one possible exception, it has been a failure. And

even in that one district in which a partial success has been obtained in the acquisition of English, the result has been secured in spite of the ——— method rather than because of it; brilliant teachers succeed everywhere in spite of heartbreaking obstacles. The ——— method uses as raw material 92 words which represent ideas perfectly familiar to the normal American child at the age when he enters school. This feature is a source of strength to the method when used in American schools. This advantage disappears, however, when the method is used with non-English-speaking children in a non-English environment. Those 92 words are as foreign to the average Porto Rican child who enters the first grade as any 92 words would be in this non-English environment. It is true that an attempt has been made to adapt the method to local conditions. The introductory story is told in Spanish and the dramatic features of the method are vigorously exploited. Our observation leads us to conclude that no amount of histrionic ability short of genius, nothing but direct translation will make the Porto Rican child grasp the full import of such phrases as these: "tell of the spring", "want to play", "some other day", "the rain is over", "sing for joy", "cover with snow the cold, bare ground", "Now the wind begins to blow, Faster, faster comes the snow", "he sings at peep of day", and this delightful bit of quaint poetry served in the first reader to the second-grade pupils: "Whichever way the wind doth blow—Some heart is glad to have it so. Then blow it east or blow it west—The wind that blows—that wind is best."

Suppose for the sake of argument that the genius of a teacher overcomes the handicap of the content of the ——— primer, for instance, and the first-grade pupil acquires the 92 words for free use. Is that an adequate return for the time spent and the effort of genius? Does the possession of that vocabulary materially help the child to express thought in English and to take up further studies in *English*, which is the desideratum? We doubt whether the most enthusiastic defender of the ——— method will make such a claim for it.

What is the result of this misguided beginning? In the second, third and fourth grades we find the pupils reading page after page of the readers without the faintest idea of what the words mean. They call words; they do not read thoughts. They can not read the thoughts because it is far easier for them to recognize the printed symbols and to call them out than to grasp the thought they convey. The words they read have the value of paper money which is not

backed by silver or gold: they stand for nothing. In the child's mind there are no ideas that correspond to the words that issue from his lips. The books are graded on the basis of difficulty in symbol interpretation. Underlying these symbols there are ideas perfectly familiar to the American child and totally foreign to the Porto Rican pupil. The natural result is that the Porto Rican child's mastery of the substratum of ideas does not keep pace with his mastery of the printed symbols. The mastery of ideas is retarded because the child lives in a non-English environment which is not favorable for the free play of those ideas clothed in English symbols. Moreover, the Porto Rican child's mastery of symbol interpretation is quickened because, at the same time, he is trying to master the mechanism of Spanish reading. Between the Spanish and English alphabets there are notable similarities, particularly in the phonetic value of some consonants. The symbols are identically the same in physical appearance. Consequently, the child who is being taught the mechanism of Spanish reading by the phonetic method learns to interpret a number of symbols which aid him to call out certain English words which contain the same symbols. This fictitious facility in symbol interpretation is frequently mistaken for ability to read English and to use English.

In all justice, we should blame ourselves rather than the ——— method. It is entirely our fault that we attempt to teach the Porto Rican child to read in English before he knows any English. Elsewhere, the child spends the first six years of his life acquiring a speaking vocabulary. When he begins to read, his problem is to recognize familiar ideas through the medium of printed symbols—a task comparatively simple, or one that may be made and has been made comparatively easy. Compare this with the task that we impose on the Porto Rican child! Consider that he must, at the same time, master the mechanism of Spanish reading. Would it not be more sensible to have the Porto Rican child master the mechanism of reading directly through the medium of his mother-tongue and devote the time now wasted on English reading to give him a vocabulary of English words representing ideas which would enable him to begin to think in English and to express thought in English? Then, instead of asking the child to read without understanding such phrases as "he sings at peep of day" and "Whichever way the wind doth blow—Some heart is glad to have it so", we would teach him *drally* such utilitarian English as this: "I wash my hands with soap", "I clean my teeth with a brush". It requires neither rhyme nor extra-

ordinary dramatic ability to teach these homely but valuable phrases which would pave the way for the acquisition of a type of English which today is an unrealized ideal with us.

When the child reaches the third grade he has read in English one primer, one reader and one language book, but he finds to his surprise that he has not learned enough English to do his arithmetic work. He is required to think in English, to reason out processes in English. His previous training in the language has not prepared him for this. He not only can not think in English but the vocabulary in which the concrete problems of arithmetic are stated differs unfairly from what he has been used to. He looks in vain for "acorns on the cold, bare ground", and little birds singing in the trees "at peep of day". Instead he is suddenly confronted by a dragon like this: "The retail price of asparagus was 15 cents a bunch, and the wholesale price was 12 cents. How much was a retail dealer's profit on 20 bunches that he bought at wholesale?" More dragons lurk in the geography book studied in the fifth grade, in the physiology text used in the sixth and in the history taken in the seventh to acquaint him with the marvelous growth of North American ideals. The child resorts to memorization and the teacher tolerates it. What else can he do?

To the most casual observer it must be apparent that, beginning with the first grade, the Porto Rican children are not learning English fast and well enough to enable them to take up the work of each higher grade in *English* and to progress normally. The bilingual system breaks down. And the cause of this failure lies herein: that we are attempting to teach English to the Porto Rican child as if it were his mother-tongue. From "Come away, Come and play", the first lesson in the ——— primer, to the patriotic selection on the Star Spangled Banner with which the ——— two-book language series ends, we follow identically the same method and use the same material which have been found good to teach English to American children in American schools. In other words, not only do we fail to begin the teaching of English well but at no point between the first and eighth grades do we make an effort to adapt method and content to the peculiar conditions obtaining in Porto Rico. The two ——— books are an exception which, however, does not materially affect the results. Using such a method and content we must perforce take a great many things for granted, harp on others which should not be touched and overlook still others which should command our attention. Let us see what this means.



It has been intimated already in the preceding pages that it is a mistake to direct our efforts solely to teach the first-grade pupils how to read in English. It is proper that they be taught English. But teaching them English and how to read in English are two things totally different. The —— method represents an effort to teach our first-grade pupils the mechanism of English reading as if the mechanism of English reading were the first step, the *sine qua non* to acquire English. We make the attempt unmindful of the fact that at the same time we are trying to make the child master the mechanism of Spanish reading. This double-headed method is a source of confusion, an unnecessary duplication of labor which, in the hands of unexpert teachers, results in the mastery of neither Spanish nor English reading. The confusion and the duplication of labor arise from our disregard of the similarities and differences in the phonetic value of the English and the Spanish symbols. The vowels have different phonetic values in each language, but the following consonants have, for all practical purposes, essentially the same sound in Spanish as in English: *b*, hard *c*, *d*, *f*, *l*, *m*, *n*, *p*, initial *r*, sibilant *s*, *t*, *v* and *x*. To fail to utilize these similarities is a waste of effort which absorbs time that should be devoted to the mastery of those peculiarities of English speech which constitute the essential differences between this language and Spanish. Moreover, the mother-tongue is the medium which offers the least resistance for the mastery of those details which make up the mechanism of reading in general, and it is the surest road to acquire the habit of thought-reading as against mere word-reading. Therefore, a pupil who has mastered the mechanism of reading through the medium of Spanish can, with some special training in the phonetic values of English vowels and of those consonants and combinations of consonants which have peculiar English sounds, read simple English sentences formed with words which he has previously acquired through the ear. For all such reading in English, and this is all the reading in English which our first-grade pupils need, if they need any at all, no complex preparation in the mechanism of English reading as such is necessary. The undue emphasis we place on the training of the eye through reading as a means to give our pupils a practical mastery of English is the original sin of our method of teaching English.

The unnecessary duplication of labor continues through the grades. Take the matter of punctuation, for instance. The differences between Spanish and English punctuation are quite negligible. If the pupil masters punctuation through the medium of Spanish it serves

him for both languages. It would serve him for quite a few of the western European languages. Yet, in the second grade, we begin to teach punctuation in both languages and continue to do so through the eighth grade and the high schools as if punctuation in English and punctuation in Spanish were isolated facts demanding special attention. And the worst of this is that the second-grade pupil who spends the greater part of the time devoted to English repeating that he puts a period after a statement and a question mark after each question frequently fails to do either. Take English capitalization. The only differences between English and Spanish capitalization are that the names of the days of the week, the months and the adjectives derived from proper nouns, such as French, German, Italian, etc., are written with capital letter in one language and with small letter in the other. In short, considerable portions of the formal grammar which we teach in the upper grades are duplicated. A common noun is a common noun in either language. The same is more or less true of the entire grammatical terminology as well as of the processes and other tricks of the trade used to teach the pupils the so-called logic of the grammar grades, otherwise vulgarly known as, and frequently discredited, but nonetheless taught, *formal grammar*.

We not only duplicate labor and dwell on the obvious, but we take too many things for granted, or rather, too much is taken for granted in our English textbooks, even in those which, like the ——— series, make an attempt to present material adapted to local needs. The First ——— book, for instance, contains this verse on page 12:

“Study and play from morn till night,  
Sleep when night has come;  
Ready again, at morning light,  
For pictures, books and fun.”

Now, this bit of verse is as deceiving as Gray's *Elegy* in a Country Churchyard. The words are short and have an unmistakable Saxon exterior. They are common. So is the vocabulary of Gray's *elegy*. Yet, the ordinary school boy or girl is not mature enough to grasp the full import of the thought underlying Gray's masterpiece, as some one has pointed out. Appearances deceive. There is nothing in the previous English training of our second-grade pupils that justifies the insertion of that bit of verse as the sixth lesson of their language book. Yet, that's what it is—the sixth lesson. The twenty-fifth lesson in the same book shows that the sixth is not an accident

but rather a necessary part of a plan to give the second grade something beautiful whose beauty they are about as able to appreciate as the blind are able to appreciate sunsets. Here is the twenty-fifth lesson:

“What can a little baby do?  
Clap his hands and coo and coo,  
Kick and roll and smile and grow;  
That is why we love him so.”

Our textbooks emphasize the difference in usage between *think* and *guess*, *teach* and *learn*, *may* and *can*, *lie* and *lay*, *sit* and *set*, etc., because American children misuse these words. Our children, if they learn them, learn them well and, therefore, this work of reconstruction is unnecessary. This is a glaring example of misdirected effort and unadaptability of content to local needs. On the other hand, which of our textbooks devotes a single lesson to drive home the differences in usage between *do* and *make*, *say* and *tell*, *see* and *look*, *pass* and *spend*, and countless other words which our pupils never master in spite of the vast amount of reading stuff through which they flounder in the course of eight years?

In the foregoing pages the discussion of the problem has been largely or entirely destructive. In the remaining pages an attempt is made to offer suggestions of a constructive nature. The first set of suggestions is for immediate use, irrespective of any change in the course of study. The eighth-grade papers which originated this bulletin show that our method of teaching English needs strengthening along the following lines:

(a) Training in the accurate use of nouns and adjectives. Special attention to the idiomatic usage of *some*, *any*, *something*, *anything*, *much*, *many*, *few*, *little*, etc. The pupils themselves constantly show in what they are weak. Let the teachers watch for such mistakes and correct them.

(b) More emphasis on the formation of irregular plurals. Less memorization of rules and more drill. This work should receive special attention in grades 3-6.

(c) Drill on the division of words into syllables. This should begin in the fourth grade and continue through the eighth.

(d) Special attention to the fact that the English adjective is not inflected in number. Drill to eradicate such errors as *goods lands*, *somes books*, etc. This should be emphasized wherever and whenever the adjective is taught.

(e) Thorough drill on the regular and irregular comparison of the adjective and the adverb. This should receive attention in grades 4-8.

(f) Thorough drill on the use of the pronoun. In one form or another, this should receive attention in every grade.

(g) Thorough drill on the use of the auxiliaries *do*, *does* and *did*. This should be drilled from the third grade up.

(h) Thorough drill on the use of the various verbal forms. This should begin in the third grade with the third person singular of the present indicative, a form which is both very common and difficult for Porto Rican children.

(i) Proper attention to tense sequence, specially in conditional clauses. This should be emphasized in the seventh and eighth grades.

(j) In general, more attention to English construction and idiomatic usage. Whenever the textbooks present a lesson in usage which does not constitute a local difficulty, it should be substituted by another which responds to our needs.

(k) Finally, an effort to increase steadily the dynamic or working vocabulary of the pupils. At present, our pupils use only a very limited number of words which they are able to recognize and understand. They can not think and express thought in English unless they have an adequate working vocabulary of English words. This should be kept in mind.

The following suggestions are for a future revision of the course of study. They are offered more as a goal to attain than as remedies for immediate application.

1. That we find or prepare a substitute for the —— method. This substitute method should aim to teach English rather than how to read in English. It should attempt to train the ear and the vocal organs of the child rather than his eye. It should be largely objective and dramatic. It should make free use of games, songs, action exercises. It should give close attention to correct pronunciation and correct habits of pronunciation.

2. That we expurgate our course of study and eliminate therefrom the vast amount of reading stuff which serves no useful purpose, and that we substitute therefor carefully graded selections, chosen because of their suitability for conversation and simple composition.

3. That we make a thorough study of the idiomatic similarities and differences obtaining between Spanish and English and that we devote the closest attention to them so that our pupils will not acquire either anglicized Spanish or castillianized English.

4. That we teach through the medium of Spanish all rules of punctuation, capitalization and formal grammar common to both languages and through English only what is peculiarly English.

5. That we devote in all grades special attention to English conversation rather than to English reading.

6. That we outline, from the third grade up, a systematic plan for English composition, leading from the sentence to the writing of connected paragraphs. This composition work should aim at the mastery of English idiom; it should be the complement of the conversational exercises.

7. That we raise the absolute proscription which now weighs on the use of Spanish in connection with the teaching of English. Spanish was proscribed from the English classes because of the danger that teachers would use it excessively to the detriment of English. Frequently, the vernacular is the only means at the command of the teacher to explain a word or phrase which expresses an abstract idea, a technical term or an idiomatic expression. The vernacular should be used to explain whatever can not be explained directly through the medium of English. Such a moderate use of the vernacular saves time.

8. That in the work of composition we include exercises in translation from Spanish into English as an aid in mastering equivalent idiomatic expressions in both languages.

To sum up: for the past seventeen years the Department of Education has adhered to a definite language policy—the conservation of Spanish and the acquisition of English, both to be mastered sufficiently for practical use. This policy responds to the best educational interests of the Island. To carry out this policy, the Department has evolved, by experiment, a bilingual plan of instruction in accordance with which Spanish is used as the medium of instruction in the rural schools with English as a special subject, English as the medium of instruction in the secondary schools with Spanish as a special subject, and both English and Spanish as media of instruction and as special subjects in the elementary graded schools. In the elementary graded system a certain balance is maintained between both languages, calculated to insure the conversation of the mother-tongue and the acquisition of English. Results show that, in regard to the acquisition of English, the bilingual plan breaks down in the elementary graded schools. The evidence examined shows that the probable cause of this failure lies in a misconception of the method and material best suited to teach English to non-English speaking

children who are studying at the same time their mother-tongue. This misconception is revealed in the attempt to teach English to the Porto Rican children as if it were their mother-tongue, without regard to the fact that they live in a non-English environment, and without utilizing the advantages which accrue to the children from linguistic training in their native language. Because of this misconception, a great many things are taken for granted, others are unduly emphasized and still others, which should demand the closest attention, entirely overlooked. To remedy this evil, it is recommended that the course of study to teach English be revised along the following general lines: (a) elimination of reading as the main objective and substitution therefor of a plan in which conversation and written expression receive the chief emphasis; (b) the teaching through Spanish of all rules of punctuation, capitalization and whatever is common to both languages, because Spanish is the medium which offers the least resistance to the effective mastery of these things; (c) special attention to peculiar English idiom and structure; that is, to those features which make this language difficult for Spanish-speaking children.

After the method and content of our plan of teaching English have been reorganized, adapted to local needs and thoroughly tried, it will be time to decide whether the bilingual scheme of instruction should be rejected or not. Until such time comes it is not wise to make fundamental changes in the scheme itself on *a priori* considerations. Experimentation is the safer course.









